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[For general geographic information on Sinkiang see 2: Cressey, AF1 China AF1, category 116, pp. 249-271.]

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[For information on the geography of Sinkiang, see 81: Cressey, AF1 China, category 116, pp. 327-335.]

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AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK

I. The Pre-Communist Period

A. Introduction

Since the Chinese Communist Party came to power, its interest in the Northwest, as an area for economic development, has increased. The Communists feel that this vast region of 1,232,074 square miles, which is roughly one-third of the total area of China (3,657,765 square miles), offers unlimited opportunities for economic development. They claim that vast mineral deposits exist, that agriculture can be greatly expanded, and that the Northwest might serve as an outlet for some of the heavily populated sections of China Proper. Of China's total population of 582,605,000 million people, only 35,360,000 reside in the Northwest (Shensi: 15,881,000; Kansu and Ninghsia: 12,928,000; Chinghai: 1,677,000; and Sinkiang: 6,874,000). These figures are from the 1953 census report.

Since 1949, the Communists have begun to develop this area as rapidly as their limited capital and technological resources permit. Though the development of agriculture is only one aspect of their program, it is the foundation on which Communist planning in the Northwest rests.

B. Sinkiang

1. The geographical setting

Sinkiang is enclosed on the north, south, and west by mighty mountain masses and on the eastern side by wide stretches of barren plateau and is bisected by the lofty Tienshan, or Heavenly Mountains, which rise to heights of 23,000 feet and extend across the province from west to east, dividing the region into two unequal parts. The southern area, two-thirds of the whole, is the Tarim Basin, the land of oases and deserts. The northern part is Dsungaria, traditionally the land of the nomads. The total area of the province is about 600,000 square miles, or twice the size of Texas.

In the Tarim Basin, named from the east flowing river of the same name, is one of the world's driest deserts, the Takla Makan, which at its lowest point is actually below sea level. Vegetation is almost non-existent, so that nomadism is impossible except on a few alluvial fans where water lies near enough to the surface to support grass. The average rainfall is less than four inches a year. Water comes from the mountains which fringe the desert on the north, west and south. From the melting upland snows and glaciers, rivers cut their way down to the central oval desert. Where each river leaves the foothills, men dig canals to spread the water out in a fan, forming an oasis, so that the edige of the desert along the foot of the mountains is dotted by a series of oases.